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“AS WIDE AS THE WORLD”: EXAMINING AND OVERCOMING AMERICAN NEO-
IMPERIALISM IN THREE NOVELS

by

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1.1 Introduction

“Literature’s freedom to explore endless or exquisite details, portray the thoughts of imaginary characters, and dramatize large themes through intricate plots brings it closest to the reality of ‘how the world really works’” (4). So says Charles Hill, an official in the US Foreign Service. His statement points to the inextricable relationship between literature and politics. Though the realm of literature may be underestimated as merely fiction, it has real-world implications and value. Literature raises questions regarding international relations decisions throughout history, such as foreign policy, globalization, and colonization. For example, classical texts such as Homer’s *The Odyssey* and the Bible are some of the earliest documents to discuss international events. Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* describes the French invasion of Russia, and novels such as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* document European colonialism in Africa. As Hill states, a literary work “illuminates one or another facet of the centuries-long process leading to the current world order, providing ways, new and old, to think about it” (4). Thus, literature can serve as key in understanding international conflicts and decisions due to its ability to discuss and reframe large, global issues. The crafting of a text entails reframing and nuancing ideas about people, ideas, or the world and choosing the most poignant language and construction to do so. Thus, the reader of a literary text partakes in a new approach to topics, while adding their own interpretations and experiences to their reading.

In addition, language and writing are powerful tools for dissent and critique, and as Edward Bulwer-Lytton famously said, “The pen is mightier than the sword.” Thus, imperialists go to great lengths to control the language surrounding their regime. As a vehicle that can convey dangerous language, literature may threaten, critique, or undermine a regime. Under the

paranoia of the Cold War in the US, for example, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy understood this threat that literature posed to American nationalism and capitalist ideology. He instituted a committee to indict “Un-American” individuals, including playwright Arthur Miller. This desperate desire to control the language surrounding a regime extends to the international arena as well, especially when trying to maintain colonial or imperial control. As Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explains, “The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately themselves” (3). This “cultural bomb” attempts to eliminate all forms of culture in which people root their identity and their dissent, including literature. These efforts attest to the extremely powerful role that literature can play in generating and upholding opposition to imperialism.

Scholar Makere Harawiraa defines imperialism as a “total system of foreign power wherein another culture, people and way of life penetrate, transform and come to define the colonized society. Thus imperialism is the defining characteristic of colonialism in both its past and present forms.” American neo-imperialism generally refers to the expansion of the United States’ influence and the exertion of its power (military, political, social and economic) over other nations. Unlike the traditional breed of imperialism, which typically employs the practice of direct colonialism (the establishment of colonial government control in the colonized state), neo-imperialism after World War II employs different tactics of control: rather than clearly claim the outside nation as one’s own, the neo-imperialist may simply establish a military base or provide foreign aid to create economic and political dependence. Much like it did during

eighteenth and nineteenth century European colonialism, the more powerful nation benefits from the neo-imperialist relationship, to the economic, political, or environmental detriment of the imperialized country. However, unlike the traditional breed of imperialism, neo-imperialists gain more and risk less. For example, rather than paying the costs of invading a nation and securing power, the imperialist nation can gain billions of dollars by establishing a favorable trade agreement or installing a dictator that will accept bribes to favor the neo-imperialist interests.

Three late twentieth century novels confront American neo-imperialism after World War II: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977); Paul Theroux's *The Mosquito Coast* (1981); and Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998). Following the American victory in WWII in 1945, the US became a global hegemonic power. The US headed the creation of the United Nations, an international body that took on the task of decolonization through its Special Committee on Decolonization. At the same time, however, the United States continued to secure neo-imperialist control in Latin America, Asia, and Africa through economic and political agreements. With the onset of the Cold War and the threat of communism, the US felt it especially crucial to maintain capitalism and democracy abroad. These desires led to many controversial imperialist strategies that are alluded to in the three novels: while making a public push for decolonization within the UN, the US was simultaneously challenging the sovereignty of newly independent nations through heavy-handed economic and political pressures. These novels also depict strategies for and against neo-imperialism. Kingsolver and Theroux use chauvinistic male characters to embody neo-imperialism, drawing dichotomies between the neo-imperialist character and his family, and between victims and perpetrators. On the other hand, Silko's discussion of neo-imperialism portrays it as an encompassing, omnipresent force

with the ability to affect everyone equally, both the victims and perpetrators of neo-imperialism.

Though these three novels are interestingly similar in the ways they confront neo-imperialism, several key differences exist between them. The position of both the authors and narrators differs in relation to the setting of the novel. Kingsolver and Theroux, white American authors, follow stories of American characters observing the neo-imperialism embodied by other white Americans in the Congo and Honduras. Conversely, in *Ceremony*, Silko focuses on the story of a young Native American man attempting to confront and overcome neo-imperialism after returning to the US from WWII.

This paper discusses the novels in order of their complexity. *The Poisonwood Bible* is rife with allegory, but the meaning is easily understood and adheres to black-and-white expectations: the abusive, ignorant missionary clearly represents the imperialist nature of the United States. *The Mosquito Coast* is more complex, since the father both completely renounces neo-imperialism and embodies it: the layering of hypocrisy and truth make Theroux's text more interesting but also more complex to analyze. Finally, *Ceremony* is the most sophisticated of the three because neo-imperialist ideals are not embodied in just one character. Rather, neo-imperialism in *Ceremony* is more an *idea* to be overcome in the lives of both whites and Native Americans. To this end, *Ceremony* lends a unique perspective on the consequences and antidotes for neo-imperialism.

2.1 *The Poisonwood Bible* –This Novel in History

“It was difficult to realize the problems facing Africa without visiting the Continent. Some of the peoples of Africa have been out of the trees for only about fifty years.” – Vice President

Richard Nixon, National Security Council meeting, 1960

“The Belgians and American business brought civilization to the Congo! American aid will be the Congo’s salvation! You’ll see!” - Nathan Price, *The Poisonwood Bible*

The Poisonwood Bible’s timeframe (1959-1986) includes the colonial period in the Congo, Congolese independence, civil war, and the Congo under dictatorship. According to historian George Martelli, the Congo under Belgian colonialism was one of the richest countries in Central Africa (ix). Due to this wealth, the Congo was on the international radar as it pursued independence. The United States, especially, was interested in how the whole matter would conclude, since it wanted to protect its capitalist interests abroad. As independence approached, politicians from both the Congo and the outside world, such as Tshombe, Lumumba, Kasavubu, Eisenhower, and Baudouin, entered from several arenas to fill the power vacuum. As Martelli explains, “All empires, when the imperial power is removed, fall apart under the pressure of self-determination exerted by their component peoples, unless a new force arises within them, a Washington or a Lenin, to induce or impose a different kind of unity” (249). The Congo, then, buckled under the internal and external forces.

Two main powers rose to power: Moise Tshombe, supported by the United States and Belgium, and Patrice Lumumba, supported by the Soviets. As these players battled for the Congo, the US believed it was becoming increasingly vital to establish its control, especially in the context of the Cold War. By asserting dominance in the region, the United States could

work to assure that its capitalist interests would remain intact in the Congo and avoid the spread of communism. The post-WWII American policy of containment justified the use of economic and political rule in the Congo, a new breed of colonialism. In the name of containment, the US manipulated leaders in other nations, so much like previous colonizers, the US had effective control of the nation.

Lumumba, Congo's first elected prime minister, was educated in a Catholic mission and worked as a postal worker before rising to prominence. He spread the idea of national unity and had moderate to socialist leanings; he demonstrated his revolutionary stance during a speech at the Congo's capital, a violent anti-colonialist tirade (Martelli, 231). Tshombe, on the other hand, was a leader in the Congo's southern province of Katanga, the location of the majority of the mines and other natural resources. He vowed to protect Western economic interests, and eventually seceded Katanga from the Congo in 1960 with the help of the West. As historian Thomas Borstelmann discusses, "Tshombe's white American defenders included an array of prominent conservatives in both parties who appreciated his anti-Communism, openness to foreign investors, nominal Christianity, and general orientation toward the West" (148). Driven by the need to reunify his country, Lumumba unsuccessfully sought help from the United Nations before turning to the Soviet Union for support.

Sensing the threat of communism, the US continued to exert more and more influence in the region. Borstelmann describes: "Eisenhower's goals in this crisis were twofold and somewhat contradictory: to preserve Western access to Katangan minerals (for which Tshombe was the best instrument), and to maintain a unified Congo with a central government oriented more to the West than the East (for which Lumumba was probably the best instrument)" because though Lumumba leaned slightly left, he held control over the greatest portion of the

country (128). Eisenhower gave priority to the latter, but played both sides of the fence to keep all options open. The US State Department believed Lumumba to be “an opportunist, and not a Communist” well into August of 1960. However, strategies shifted and the Eisenhower administration, made the decision that it would be less complicated to control the Congo without Lumumba in the picture. Though the United States denies participation, most historians agree that the United States’ Central Intelligence Agency helped support Lumumba’s assassination; according to Borstelmann, US involvement can be traced to the end of August 1960, five months before Lumumba’s death, when Eisenhower granted the CIA permission to eliminate Lumumba.

Lumumba was replaced with America’s new choice, Mobutu Sese Seko. According to historian Diane Kunz, “With his staunch pro-Western stance, Mobuto became a favored African ruler in Washington, especially during the Nixon-Kissinger years” (290). American Cold War interests overrode the interests of Congolese voters as the Americans murdered their prime minister and replaced him with a corrupt dictator. Even as Mobutu exhibited nationalist tendencies, such as renaming colonial towns with African names, Americans “blithely ignored it,” as long as Mobutu resisted the allure of communism. Mobutu’s climb to power represented a neo-imperialist victory for the United States: he was the ideal puppet to protect American capitalist interests. With Mobutu in place, the threat of communism subsided and the US had made its neo-imperialist presence known in the Congo. Though there were some disagreements with the US in the 1970s, Mobutu remained a friend of US presidents and an ally of the American government up through the nineties. For the Congo, however, Mobutu’s thirty-year dictatorship was rife with corruption, human rights violations, and violence.

2.2 *The Poisonwood Bible* – Plot Summary

The Poisonwood Bible begins with the Prices, an American missionary family from Georgia, moving to the Belgian Congo in 1959. Nathan, a Baptist preacher, heads the family. He is joined in the Congo by Orleanna, his wife, and their four daughters: fifteen-year-old Rachel, twelve-year-old twins Leah and Adah (who is physically disabled), and five-year-old Ruth May. The five women narrate the story, though only Orleanna has a retrospective point of view: her chapters are all narrated from Georgia, after she has returned from the Congo. The family settles in Kilanga, a small village, but they encounter difficulties in converting the people there to Christianity. For one, the river that Nathan wants to baptize children in is overrun with crocodiles. Even after the family gets discouraged about their mission, realizing Nathan's failures, he continues to preach Christianity. The family's loyalty further diminishes when, due to political conflict, they are advised to leave the country, and Nathan refuses.

The Congo's independence in 1960 marks a turning point for the Prices; comfort and survival become much more difficult for them. Ruth May has a malaria scare, and food becomes increasingly scarce. After an especially intense drought, the villagers go on a communal hunt. Leah, wanting to attract the attention of the schoolteacher, Anatole, takes up archery and wants to participate in the hunt, even though she is a woman. The village becomes divided over the issue, and the local medicine man, Tata Kuvundundu, is especially bitter about Leah becoming involved. He says ominously, ““The snakes will come out of the ground and seek our houses instead of hiding in their own. *Bwe?* You did this. You decided the old ways are no good”” (339). He plants a venomous snake in their chicken coop, and when the children go to investigate, Ruth May is bitten and dies.

In a daze, Orleanna gives away all their possessions, buries her child, and by late that afternoon, she is taking her remaining three daughters on an exodus out of the Congo. Rachel escapes to South Africa with Eeban Axelroot, the sleazy airplane pilot who has been delivering the Prices' food and supplies. After partaking in several affairs and marriages, she becomes a hotel manager in the Congo and remains a single woman for the remainder of the novel. Adah returns with Orleanna to the US, where Orleanna remains haunted by their experience and the death of Ruth May. Adah becomes a doctor, and a colleague cures her of her limp and crookedness. Leah remains in the Congo, marries Anatole, and has four boys; as the wife of a political activist, her bitterness towards the Western world and the corruption in the Congo grows immensely. The sisters reunite to discover that their father lost his mind in the jungle and died in a fire, and they return to the Congo with Orleanna to make peace with Ruth May's death.

2.3 *The Poisonwood Bible* – Key Theme: Gender

The Poisonwood Bible was clearly set in a time period in which the United States pursued neo-imperialist interests in the Congo. Kingsolver overtly presents history in the novel through symbolism and narration, and both vehicles critique American actions at the time. Even the family name, Price, serves as a reminder of the consequences of neo-imperialism and the allegory between the family and their country. *Price* connects to the capitalist and economic motives that drove the US to facilitate Lumumba's assassination. Political turmoil and cultural conflict lead to Ruth May's death on the same day – the price the family pays for coming to the Congo.

However, it is Nathan who serves as the most obvious and constant symbol. As the overbearing father and missionary, he is the most consistently controlling and ignorant characters. A chauvinistic and a patriot, he attempts to impose his beliefs on his family and the Congolese and becomes the perfect embodiment of American neo-imperialism. Kingsolver thus constructs a strong dichotomy between Nathan and the Price women: he is not caring or adaptive, nor does he ever recognize the harm that he does in the Congo. Kingsolver employs gender assumptions to characterize Nathan in contrast to the women. He is overly masculine in his stubbornness and aggression; the women begin as passive victims of Nathan's dominance and a complicit American presence in the Congo, but they transform into regretful, self-aware heroines. The Price family consists of a very gendered dichotomy that is also a dichotomy of "good" and "bad."

Nathan is overtly gendered as very masculine: he is domineering in both build and demeanor. His wife Orleanna states, "Nathan as a boy played football on his high school team in Killdeer, Mississippi, with great success evidently, and expected his winning season to continue ever after" (96). As a successful football player from a town called Killdeer, Kingsolver demonstrates his history of domination and violence, as well as his continued expectation to win.

His masculine characteristics also play into his role as an American neo-imperialist. He imperializes the Congolese by undermining the village peoples' self-determination and way of life: "'They are living in darkness. Broken in body and soul, and don't even see how they could be healed'" (53). He consistently tries to impose his lifestyle and beliefs on them, regardless of their own traditions. His ignorant opinion mirrors that of several American leaders. For instance, Kunz quotes then Vice-President Richard Nixon stating at a National Security

Council meeting in January 1960, ““It was difficult to realize the problems facing Africa without visiting the Continent. Some of the peoples of Africa have been out of the trees for only about fifty years”” (Kunz 289). Nixon’s statement illustrates American stereotyping of the African continent as primitive and under-developed, ideas propagated by such ill-informed statements by prominent US politicians. Nathan embodies this neo-imperialist mindset when he remarks, ““The Belgians and American business brought civilization to the Congo! American aid will be the Congo’s salvation! You’ll see”” (121)! He is determined to bring the Congolese his idea of civilization and believes wholeheartedly that the US is right in all its actions. Attaching the idea of economic aid to the salvation (a word with strong religious connotations) demonstrates the parallel between religion and neo-colonialism. Nathan believes wholeheartedly that the integration of American religion and economic aid into the Congo will help lift the Congolese out of their “savagery.” Moreover, he seeks to justify his own power as bringing civilization and Christianity to the Congo, expecting “his winning season to continue ever after” (96). As a young soldier, he failed his nation in battle, where all his comrades died heroically. As Orleanna describes, he “could not flee from the same jungle twice” (413). To him, the Congo is reminiscent of Bataan, and serves as a constant reminder of the embarrassment of failure. This mindset adds to his rigid stance on his religion and his desperate need to assert himself abroad.

However, other characters showcase Nathan’s foolishness and critique his opinion. For example, after Ruth May breaks her arm, Nathan and Eeban Axelroot fly her to see a Belgian doctor. Nathan argues with the doctor that the Americans are helping the Congo by building roads and railroads. The doctor sarcastically replies by asking Ruth May, ““Did your father bring you here by automobile? Or did you take the passenger railway”” (121). Ruth May thinks,

“He was just being a smart aleck and Father and I didn’t answer him. They don’t have any cars in the Congo and he knew it” (121). Just as Ruth May explains, the doctor is merely mocking Nathan’s imperialist ideas about the Congo; though Nathan believes that the American involvement is nothing but beneficial to the Congolese, the doctor points out that this is untrue; navigable roads are nonexistent, there is no central government, and every woman expects at least one of her children to die before adulthood. Kingsolver shows the irony of Nathan’s neo-imperialist attitude by showcasing his ignorance about both Congolese civilization and the American role there. Nathan, like the American authorities, tries to justify his presence in the Congo by asserting that he is helping, not harming, the Congolese.

In addition, Nathan is adamant about his superiority over the Congolese. He sees any sort of camaraderie as a betrayal to his ideals. He refuses to negotiate with the village leader on issues of morality and accuses his predecessor, Brother Fowles, of going “plumb crazy, consorting with the inhabitants of the land” (38). Even while present, Nathan strives to maintain social distance to preserve his imperialist status as a foreign superior. This relationship between distance and presence relates to the differences between imperialism and neo-imperialism. Kingsolver rejects this mindset later when Brother Fowles, married to a Congolese woman, visits the village, is welcomed by everyone, and speaks about the success he had as a missionary there. Though Brother Fowles is also an American in the Congo, his work is characterized by his humanitarian efforts, and his camaraderie with the village people demonstrates his rejection of imperialist ideas. Meanwhile, by maintaining racial and cultural distinctions between himself and the Congolese, Nathan can continue to see himself as superior, a key tenet of neo-imperialism.

Kingsolver also presents cultural domination as a tool for neo-imperialism, and again, Nathan is the primary agent for imperialism via cultural domination, especially considering his role as a missionary. Cultural domination through missionary work is not a new tradition, Elaine R. Ognibene points out in her article, “The Missionary Position: Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*.” Ognibene states, “Kingsolver does show how...religion and politics are not separate entities, but a powerful combined force used historically not only to ‘convert the savages’ but to convert the masses to believe that what is done in the name of democratic, Christian principles is done for the greater good” (20).

Nathan, the missionary, represents the American political attitude in attempting to civilize the Congolese via the Christian religion: politics and religion go hand-in-hand. Nathan demonstrates this when he describes the “stink and taint of original sin” of the Africans and urges them to come out from “this place of *darkness!* *Arise* and come forward into a *brighter land*” (67, 28)! Seeing the Congolese as inferior and in need of redemption, Nathan justifies undermining and imperializing their society. Though Nathan may claim so, it is not truly their location or sinfulness that warrants his presence there. As Ruth May says earlier, they are permanently marked as sinners: “That’s how come them to turn out dark” (20). If skin color automatically qualifies sinfulness, then the underlying religious ideology is racist, their “sinfulness” irreparable, and imperialism permanently justified. From the outset, then, religious domination has imperialist consequences as seen in the epigraph to the novel, a quotation from the book of Genesis, “And have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” has both political and religious implications (1). Nathan’s missionary work, in the case of this novel, is a central part of cultural, ecological, and environment domination, neo-imperialist tools.

Nathan's embodiment of neo-imperialism carries through to the domestic as well. He beats his children and his wife in an attempt to assert his dominance. As Orleanna states, "I'll insist I was only a captive witness [in their endeavor to the Congo]. What is the conqueror's wife, if not a conquest herself" (9)? In a similar passage, she says, "Nathan was in full possession of the country once known as Orleanna Wharton" (200). Her words evoke the nature of Nathan's character: desperate to maintain control over everything and everyone. Kingsolver also ties this quality to Nathan's chauvinism, thus adding gender as a factor in characterizing neo-imperialism. When he finds out that Leah and Adah are intellectually gifted, he says, "'Sending a girl to college is like pouring water in your shoes.... It's hard to say which is worse: seeing it run out and waste the water, or seeing it hold in and wreck the shoes'" (56). His desire to control his daughters' lives goes so far as to deny them an education on the basis of gender inferiority. However, the passage also demonstrates that Kingsolver is describing a specific type of imperialist here: he is a man, and he is a chauvinist in terms of both patriotism and sexism. His gendered characteristics – aggression, chauvinism, and desire for control – are also his neo-imperialist characteristics. Nathan is not simply an embodiment of neo-imperialism; his machismo incorporates his bigotry. Like the Congo itself, the women in his family are subjected to his bigotry and abuse. Women, such as Rachel, may be absorbed in their own concerns and ignorant about the Congolese, but no character outdoes Nathan in severity or aggression.

In contrast to Nathan, the Price females are more passive in the beginning of the novel and are more or less complicit in joining Nathan in the Congo. Rachel opposes, but only because she worries about what moving to the jungle will do for her grooming habits: "Already I was heavy-hearted in my soul for the flush commodes and machine-washed cloths and other

simple things” (23). Describing their journey to the Congo, Orleanna states, “Maybe I’ll even confess the truth, that I rode in with the horsemen and beheld the apocalypse, but still I’ll insist I was only a captive witness” (9). Referring to their presence as the “apocalypse,” Orleanna acknowledges the destruction they caused. However, by remaining a “captive witness,” she eschews some blame and illustrates her complicity.

Within the larger sphere of global politics, Orleanna believes that women are only spectators to the political chaos and colonialism around them. She reflects on the women in her village, in particular her neighbor, Mama Mwanza:

“On the day a committee of men decided to murder the fledgling Congo, what do you suppose Mama Mwanza was doing? Was it different, the day after?

When a government comes crashing down, it crushes those who were living under its roof.... Mama Mwanza never knew the house was there at all....

Conquest and liberation and democracy and divorce are words that mean squat, basically, when you have hungry children and clothes to get on the line and it looks like rain” (383).

Orleanna generally believes that women are excluded from the neo-imperialist actions committed by their country; she refers to Lumumba’s assassination being decided by men. She compares herself to Mama Mwanza, unable to fathom divorce much like Mama Mwanza did not consider things like democracy or liberation. For much of the novel, the Orleanna and her daughters follow Nathan in imperializing the Congo, mirroring the role that she attributes to women in the face of international neo-imperialism. In making such a connection, however, she fails to note the differences between Mama Mwanza and herself, an American woman living in an imperialized country

Though they still remain guilty of complacently following Nathan to the Congo, Kingsolver uses the second half of the novel to transform the Price women into representatives of anti-imperialism. Unlike Nathan, they aren't chauvinists, aren't radically religious, nor are they adverse to change. Finally, when they begin to question Nathan and then leave Kilanga, they begin to acknowledge how presumptuous they were in pursuing the mission in the Congo and express regret for their imperialist presence. They also, in many ways, regret their complicity towards Nathan's neo-imperialism. Adah states that, after returning to the US, her mother spends her time "asking forgiveness. Owning, disowning, recanting, recharting a hateful course of events to make sense of her complicity. We all are, I suppose" (492). Scholar Susan Strehle illustrates this change in attitude when she states, "After Lumumba and Ruth May die, the daughters choose unsettled homes and complex, diverging paths away from their father's American legacies" (413). Adah goes to college, and Rachel, who was the most resistant to Africa initially, maintains many of her xenophobic beliefs but still never returns to the United States.

Leah's transformation is the most representative of the novel as a whole: she slowly becomes the anti-imperialist and demonstrates the development of the novel's message that neo-imperialism is evil. Scholar Yaël Simpson Fletcher says, "*The Poisonwood Bible* is ... a profoundly American parable of enlightenment.... of a Christian consciousness of original sin to an awareness of the oppression of Africans by Europeans and of women by men" (198). As Simpson Fletcher describes, the characters' path stretches from ignorance to enlightenment. For Leah, this is especially true. At first, she admires her father, and relishes any attention from him. When he allows her to help with the garden, she thinks, "I was thrilled by the mere fact of his speaking to me in this gentle, somewhat personal way. He didn't look at me, of course, for

he had much on his mind, as ever” (77). She makes excuses for Nathan, even when he treats her with disdain or coldness. By doing so, she is buying into his chauvinistic and patriarchal position that causes him to disrespect his daughters. Though Leah does not seem as obviously imperialistic as Nathan at this point, she is definitely condoning, if not admiring her father’s dominance.

Leah becomes aware of her imperialist privilege when she is playing with Pascal, her Congolese friend, and he shows her the small house he built. She thinks, “It struck me what a wide world of difference there was between our sort of games – ‘Mother May I?,’ ‘Hide and Seek’ – and his: ‘Find Food,’ ‘Recognize Poisonwood,’ ‘Build a House’” (114). After she realizes the disparities between them, she is shocked and angry: “For the first time ever I felt a stirring of anger against my father for making me a white preacher’s child from Georgia” (115). With this, Leah rejects her father, and links him to the injustices that Pascal faces. It is towards the conclusion of the novel that she reiterates and solidifies her feelings of white guilt: “I want to belong to somewhere, damn it. To scrub the hundred years’ war off this white skin till there’s nothing left and I can walk out among my neighbors.... Most of all, my white skin craves to be touched and held by the one man on earth I know has forgiven me for it” (474). Leah’s marriage to Anatole is a way for her to move past the imperialism associated with her country and her race. She renounces the bigotry and intolerance that characterized her father by embodying opposite ideals.

In and of itself, the act of narration serves as a way for the Price women to challenge American neo-imperialism and overcome Nathan’s dominance. By giving the female characters the primary voices in the novels, Kingsolver gives them a power that Nathan does not have. Initially, Adah states, “Our Father speaks for all of us, as far as I can see” (32). However, as the

novel goes on, they are able to tell their own account, becoming progressively more critical of Nathan, which culminates in the decision to leave Nathan, thus eliminating his domineering presence in the story.

Primarily, the women use their narratorial position to confront and eventually denounce American neo-colonialism in the Congo. Adah critiques the actions of the US, and in general is very resistant to injustices, be it international or domestic. She speaks out against her father's religion for condemning the un-baptized to hell, for judging his religion superior enough to dictate the futures of others. She compares this to the United States murdering Lumumba, since they also imposed their beliefs onto others: "Or. Might the tall, thin man [Lumumba] rise up and declare: We don't like Ike. So sorry, but Ike should perhaps be killed now with a poisoned arrow. Oh, the magazines would have something to say about that all right. What sort of man would wish to murder the president of another land? None but a barbarian. A man with a bone in his hair" (298). Adah implies that American neo-imperialism is more barbaric than any action that Lumumba committed. Kingsolver inverts the racial hierarchy, which falsely asserts that white men like Eisenhower are too noble or dignified to commit such actions.

There is also a parallel between the "poisoned arrow" from the passage and what Nathan mistakenly calls the "poisonwood" bible. When he is trying to describe the bible as "precious," he uses a mistranslation and instead calls it poisonwood. The myth of white supremacy categorizes a black man's poisonous arrow as most dangerous and threatening. However, Nathan's drive to spread the word of the Bible is the most destructive, or poisonous, presence in their village. By turning the tables, Kingsolver illustrates the nature of American actions. Though Nathan's chauvinism and desire for success harm the village and his family, there is some hope for the future as the women claim their own agency and rebuild their lives

without him; however, the village goes largely unmentioned for the remainder of the novel, as Kingsolver focuses on the American domestic instead of the Congolese.

Kingsolver is very upfront about asserting that women are especially vital in the destruction of the imperialist system. Chauvinism and imperialism are related, in that they both have aspects of perceived superiority and desire for control. Orleanna begins to reject Nathan's male dominance when she realizes that their mission is clearly doomed. When the church leader that sponsors Nathan's mission talks about the Belgians ruling the Congo with "a fatherly hand," to which Orleanna replies, "'A fatherly hand, is that what you call it'" (165)! She is angered by the notion of the fatherly hand, because, like her abusive husband, this "father" is not loving or nurturing to his child, the Congo. Orleanna's comment draws attention to the connection between patriarchy and imperialism, a connection that becomes clearer and clearer for Orleanna.

Just as the Price women grow from complacency to awareness in the novel, Kingsolver may be challenging other women to do the same. Imperialist societies depend on women to "hold down the home front," so without their support, the system of neo-imperialism can collapse. Kingsolver discusses this complicity in an interview: "I live in a society that grew prosperous from exploiting others.... Here in the U.S., we can hardly even say the word 'postcolonial.' We like to think we're the good guys. So we persist in our denial, and live with a legacy of exploitation and racial arrogance that continues to tear people apart, in a million large and small ways" (as quoted by "Author Interview"). Kingsolver constructs her female characters as an answer to this: they become resistant to complicity and take action against imperialism, and Kingsolver thus attributes a significant role to women in the dismantling of neo-imperialism.

The dichotomy between Nathan and the Price women that Kingsolver constructs is useful in outlining “good” and “bad” for the reader. However, the issues with this dichotomy are twofold. For one, it over-simplifies the situation. The men and women are essentialized with very gendered characteristics that border on stereotypes. Nathan is dominating, assertive, aggressive, controlling, violent, and bigoted. The women begin as very passive and mainly provide support for the male character in his endeavors. They may claim some agency when they leave the mission and begin to question Nathan’s imperialist actions. However, they are limited to fairly “typical” female characteristics in their journey towards anti-imperialism: they are peaceful, adaptive, reflective, and perceptive.

The other issue with a dichotomy is that they largely leave out anything or anyone that does not fit into its categories. In the case of Kingsolver’s novel, the perspectives of the Congolese are largely left out; in this sense, her novel falls short as an anti-imperialist text. Even after the three remaining sisters reunite, Leah only briefly mentions the people they left behind in Kilanga: “‘We still have a lot of contact with Kilanga. Some of the people we knew are still there. An awful lot have died, too’” (482). Though her novel may be a feminist text in that the female characters claim some power over the neo-imperialist situation, the role of colonized women specifically is ignored. It is unclear whether Kingsolver is simply lumping them together with white women, or if she is neglecting to acknowledge their role as something separate. Regardless, it is a hole in her feminist confrontation of neo-imperialism.

3.1 *The Mosquito Coast* – This Novel in History

“The change that must happen [development] requires unprecedented action carefully guided by the experts of the West. Because the Third Worlders do not have this knowledge – but instead are caught in a chronic pathological condition – the scientist, like a good doctor, has the moral obligation to intervene in order to cure the diseased (social) body.” – Political scientist Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and the Unmaking of the Third World*

“He used the word *savages* with affection, as if he liked them a little for it. In his nature was a respect for wildness. He saw it as a personal challenge, something that could be put right with an idea or a machine.” – Charlie, *The Mosquito Coast*

Unlike *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Mosquito Coast* does not overtly reference historical events as frequently: the reader is inundated with Allie’s delusional perceptions of America’s “doom.” However, Theroux does position the novel in a particular historical moment when he references the soldiers that live “in the mountains. Over the hills. Up the trees. With ruckbooses. Russians and what not” (230). The presence of the Russians locates the novel in the Cold War, during which the American and Russian fight for control in Nicaragua spilled over into Honduras. The presence of American families like the Foxes and the Spellgoods in Honduras is a more subtle hint at the increasing involvement of the US in Honduras in the 1980s.

When the socialist Sandinista government rose to power in Nicaragua, it threatened the American anti-communist agenda. The US government responded by establishing allies in the surrounding nations. According to Lapper and Painter, when President Jimmy Carter increased military aid to the Salvadorian army in 1980, it “paved the way for escalation that followed

under Reagan” by identifying the geopolitical importance of Central American countries like Honduras (74). The next five years of Honduran politics were “decisively influenced by the United States and its policy priorities towards the Central American region” (74). Thus, the US spread its neo-imperialist reach into the region in order to protect American political interests against the spread of communism.

One aspect of American neo-imperialism in Honduras was increased military involvement. American bases popped up along the border, where soldiers could quickly be deployed to Nicaragua. According to Lapper and Painter, “By 1985, a seemingly endless series of large-scale Honduran and US troop maneuvers on Honduran soil created the impression that Honduras was an occupied country” (74). Thus, the American role in Honduras began to resemble a colonizer, as the American military occupied the nation in the pursuit of its own interests. Furthermore, Honduras became an economic pawn for the US: “As in the military and political sphere, the policy prescriptions for the Honduran economy came virtually direct from the US embassy. A package of ‘free market’ measures based on ‘Reaganomics’ was introduced” (Lapper and Painter 98). With lower trade barriers, Honduras was a new market for American products and provided cheap goods to the US in return, a model that turned out a “disastrous failure” for Honduras (104). Prices of primary goods, especially Honduran crops, were driven down when exposed to other markets, which devastated farming economies. However, by providing the Hondurans with copious aid, the US was able to keep its powerful role in the nation: “Washington has provided Honduras with more than US\$900 million since 1946, of which US\$700 million was received between 1979 and 1986 (Lapper and Painter 88). Thus, the US pursued its goals of both containing communism and accessing cheap primary

goods. Through military and economic action combined, the US was the puppeteer of the Honduran state throughout the first half of the 1980s.

3.2 *The Mosquito Coast* – Plot Summary

Like *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Mosquito Coast* is about an American family in the shadow of an overbearing father. The Fox family lives in Massachusetts, and Allie Fox, the father, is openly critical of all aspects of American society. He talks about “how it got turned into a dope-taking, door-locking, ulcerated danger zone of rabid scavengers and criminal millionaires and moral sneaks” (3). His family is subjected to his rantings, his whims, and his condescension. Allie is an inventor, and in some ways appears to be a “mad scientist.” It is through young Charlie’s narration that the reader is able to understand the ways that Allie manipulates his family. For instance, when Allie becomes fed up with American society, he decides to move the family to Honduras, but refuses to tell them their destination. After bouts of arguments with the minister on the boat, named Reverend Spellgood, the Spellgoods and the Foxes arrive on the Mosquito Coast of Honduras. The Foxes find a local guide, Mr. Haddy, and moves inward on a river. Allie purchases a “town” called Jeronimo, which more closely resembles a plot of land, and the Foxes begin their life there.

Jeronimo is already inhabited by three native men and a family, and Allie immediately puts them to work clearing the land and a building water pump. He tells them, “You’re not going anywhere.... You’re staying put. I’ve got some work for you to do” (133). He claims dominance over the group, and the rest of the characters follow him with near-religious conviction as he builds “Fat Boy,” an ice-making machine that will bring “civilization” to Jeronimo. Allie leads the citizens of Jeronimo in bringing the ice to other villages, which ends

in failure because the ice melts too quickly. However, he convinces everyone to believe that the missions are a success: “As we walked, they became more certain that they had seen the ice and the amazed Indians” (225). However, for Charlie, this deception marks a turning point, as he realizes his father’s manipulative and assertive personality. From this point forward, the utopia that Allie constructed begins to disintegrate. Some residents leave, and then three strange men arrive in Jeronimo and try to gain control of the village. Threatened and cornered, Allie locks them in the ice-making machine and blows it up, causing environmental devastation that ruins Jeronimo and the surrounding rivers: “The river is dead.... It’s full of ammonium hydroxide and gasping fish. The air – smell it? – it’s contaminated” (264). The Fox family flees downriver, moving further and further inland.

They reach the town of Guampu, where the Spellgoods have their mission. When the family asks Allie to stop the boat, he replies, “This place doesn’t exist,” an indication of his megalomania and deteriorating sanity. Charlie and Jerry sneak off the boat in the night, talk to the Spellgood children, and procure keys to the Spellgoods’ jeep in order to escape to the coast and away from Allie. However, when Charlie and Jerry return to the boat and propose that the family leave in the jeep, Allie jumps off the boat and begins setting Guampu on fire. Allie is wounded in the skirmish that ensues. The family returns to the boat, and under the mother’s command, they head back to the coast. Several days later, Allie, who is paralyzed from the neck down, drags himself away from family while they’re docked on shore. When Charlie finds him, he sees that his father is being devoured by vultures, which rip out his tongue. This conclusion to their time in Honduras is symbolic of the family’s liberation: the removal of Allie’s tongue demonstrates that the family is free from his commands and his lies. They return

to America without him, which Charlie describes as “all right, no better or worse than we had left it” (374).

3.3 *The Mosquito Coast* – Key Theme: The Environment

Like Nathan Price, Allie Fox embodies imperialism. However, Allie as a symbol is more complex and ironic: while he dominates his family and the native people in an imperialistic manner, he renounces patriotism and American imperialism. Charlie cannot go anywhere without his father embarrassing him with rants about American foreign policy. For example, when Allie sees Chinese-made knapsacks in the store, he remarks, “A few years ago, we were practically at war with the People’s Republic. Red Chinese, we called them.... Now they’re selling us knapsacks – probably for the next war” (45). Allie detests the idea of global economy and international trade, because to him, all involvement is suspicious; in his paranoia, he believes that the Americans are only participating with the Chinese in order to build up for another war. Also, unlike Nathan Price, Allie criticizes America and rejects patriotic ideals. Charlie’s first description of his father, for instance, is of him “talking the whole way about...the awfulness of America – how it got turned into a dope-taking, door locking, ulcerated danger zone of rabid scavengers and criminal millionaires and moral sneaks” (3).

However, there are subtle hints of Allie’s imperialism throughout the text. Primarily, Allie’s imperialism is demonstrated by his desire to control and tame the “savage” with machinery and inventions. He consistently undermines others for what he sees as their primitivism. While the family is still in America, he calls the Latinos in Massachusetts “savages,” though not in their presence. By using the word “savage,” Allie constructs them as Other: in contrast to their savagery, he is civilized, intelligent, and modern. The fact that he

does not use the word in front of them, however, illustrates the covert nature of his beliefs. He invites them over to the house the night before departure, looks over the map of Honduras with them, and gets a feel for the geography. Allie even asks, “Are you sure you don’t want to come with us, brother” (59)? While he usually feels comfortable marginalizing them, he shows respect and camaraderie in their presence in order to get from them what he needs.

In addition, the act of Allie moving his family to Honduras resembles occupation more than immigration, and therefore parallels American foreign policy. For instance, rather than acknowledging the native Hondurans’ culture and history, he sees the nation as unconquered territory, ready for him to enlighten with his scientific and mechanical knowledge. Thus, to Allie, Honduras represents a blank slate for him to mold and develop according to his own whims and ideals. He states that the people “can’t draw a straight line. That’s why I like them. That’s innocence” (142). His statement undermines the native population and reduces them to simpletons. In his mind, his belief justifies his presence in Honduras and his role as educator and enlightener; again, he wishes to lift the Hondurans up from their “natural state.”

In contrast to the Hondurans, Allie sees himself as truly civilized. Similar to Nathan Price, Allie dreams of bringing a vital piece of his culture to the Honduran people; rather than religion, it is science. As Charlie describes, “He saw it [wildness] as a personal challenge, something that could be put right with an idea or a machine” (9). Therefore, personal interests are at the heart of Allie’s mission in Honduras, and the quality of self-interest is central to his role as imperialist. To him, the materials to build his ice machines are “the raw materials of civilization” (114). Thus, ice is civilization. Rather than working with them to provide more pragmatic tools for development, such as education or infrastructure, Allie is basically living

out his fantasies through these people's lives. As soon as the Fox family moves into their new settlement, Allie recruits workers to help build *his* utopia.

Though Allie adamantly opposes religion, his scientific devotion makes him interestingly similar to a missionary. Just as a missionary culturally dominates the society s/he imperializes by imposing religion, Allie imposes the culture of Western science because he believes it is what Honduras needs. Scholar John Rothfork makes this comparison and writes, "Do you recognize the strident tone of Manifest Destiny here? The white man's burden is no longer to carry Bibles to civilize Asia and Africa, but to bring technical manuals and the baptism of technique, for which the savages should be thankful" (219). Allie feels excited and challenged by the prospect of enlightening the native Congolese and conquering nature, similar to Nathan, and his statements oftentimes have religious undertones. When he arrives in Honduras, he tells the people, "I was sent here.... I'm not going to tell you who sent me, or why. And I'm not going to tell you who I am or what I aim to do" (136). Allie's words imply that he was sent by a higher power, but they also keep the native people guessing, an important tool in maintaining control. By remaining an enigma, Allie maintains cultural and political domination over his colony.

Furthermore, Allie drives the people living in Jeronimo to work according to his command. Though his dream society strives to be a communist utopia in which technology improves the lives of all, this is not the reality. Allie, true to American economic culture, takes charge of the group, and as the mental holder of the master plan, he owns the means of production. When several of them consider leaving, he states, "You're not going anywhere. I've got some work for you to do" (133). Allie wishes the work to get done on his own terms.

In neo-colonial fashion, he covertly controls the labor of the native population working the land and suggests that it is for their own benefit.

The majority of Allie's actions contribute to the overall ecological destruction he causes in Honduras. In his pursuit the mechanization of Jeronimo, Allie ignores ecological consequences; he embodies imperialism by disregarding the land of others in favor of his own aspirations. After they clear Jeronimo of all vegetation, Charlie describes it as "slashed and burned. It looked as though a battle had been fought there – black land, black stumps, steam and smoke issuing from cracks in the earth" (141). However, Allie describes the destruction as "part of some grand design" (141). Though the idea of a "grand design" has missionary connotations. Allie is also justifying the destruction because it happens in the pursuit of his own grand ideals. The greatest ecological issues occur after "Fat Boy," the ice-making machine explodes. Allie remarks, "The air – smell it? – it's contaminated. It'll take a year for this place to be detoxified" (264). Still he is unapologetic for the damage. Moreover, like real-world imperialism, his legacy of environmental destruction outlives his time there.

Like Nathan Price, Allie's imperialistic attitude affects his family as well; he is domineering and secretive in order to maintain control over them. Charlie's perspective gives the reader insight into Allie's manipulation of his family. Initially, Charlie believes that "the world belonged to him [Allie] and that everything he said was true" (11). Though Charlie admires his father, as most children admire their parents, his devotion wavers as the novel progresses. Slowly, he realizes that his father uses lies and fear mongering in order to control the family. When the group is trying to bring ice to a neighboring community, it all melts beforehand. Unable to accept the failure of his plan, Allie tries to convince Charlie and the rest of the crew that the mission was successful. When Charlie rejects his father's lies, Charlie

thinks, “I believed he was testing me again,” and later says, “His lie made me lonelier than any lie I had ever heard” (225, 226). This realization of the truth signals a shift in the story. The dissolution of Allie’s control over the domestic coincides with his loss of control over his colony, ultimately culminating in the destruction of Jeronimo and Allie’s death. Allie’s imperialism over Honduras is correlated to his dominance over his family.

Like the Price women, Charlie begins to fight against his father’s control and seeks his own answers to neo-imperialism. Unlike his father, Charlie finds happiness through living in harmony with Honduras’ ecology when he and the other children establish their own “town” called The Acre. The antithesis of his father, Charlie says, “But I felt that ours [settlement] was a greater achievement than Father’s, because we ate the fruit that grew nearby and used anything we found, and adapted ourselves to the jungle” (169). When Charlie tries to tell his father about the local way of deterring insects by rubbing berry juice on himself, Allie criticizes him: “He hated the look of it” (210). Charlie claims his own lifestyle that coincides with the Honduran ecology, which coincides chronologically with his decision to fight his father’s lies about the melting ice. Charlie thus overcomes his father’s control over him and Jeronimo, pointing to the usefulness of eco-friendliness in countering neo-imperialism.

In Theroux’s construction of Allie as an embodiment of neo-imperialism, the emphasis on nature is especially important. By trying to tame nature through his inventions, Allie is making a larger statement about what he thinks true civilization is. He comes to Honduras to bring civilization in the form of ice; his goal is to use machines to overcome the hot Honduran climate. However, by doing so, he illustrates the belief that there is something inherently backward in the Honduran way of life. He exhibits imperialism by suggesting that Hondurans should tame their environment for the advancement of civilization.

Like Kingsolver, Theroux employs a strict “good guy/bad guy” dichotomy in which Allie embodies neo-imperialism and subjects his family to that aggression and need for control. Again, the issue with the dichotomy that Theroux sets up is that it leaves out the native population. After Allie destroys their homes and their work in the explosion, they are not mentioned again. Even Charlie, who rejects his father’s desire to civilize Honduras with machines, still cherishes the church and money that the children have at the Acre. In this manner, the protagonist of the story still adheres to Western ideals.

4.1 *Ceremony* – This Novel in History

“American Indian participation in the construction and reproduction of Western language and meaning ensured our complicity in patriarchal power and Euro-American exploitation of our lands, resources and labor. Like colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the West – the very codes that created, reflected and reproduced our oppression.” – Scholar and Ojibwa Indian Lisa Poupart, “The Familiar Face of Genocide: Internalized Oppression among American Indians”

“The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other.” - Tayo, *Ceremony*

Ceremony takes place at a turbulent time in Native American history. The sociopolitical issues that affect Tayo, the main character, reflect the reality of Native Americans following

WWII. Native Americans constitute a separate nation from white America, as they have different origins, languages, religion, customs, political goals, and systems of governance. Though *Ceremony* is the only novel of the three to take place in the United States, it still addresses *international* issues, because the relationship between the two still consists of treaties, territorial occupation, and an ongoing struggle over sovereignty. During the Cold War era, tensions were high between Native and white America as the US government struggled to maintain a clear, capitalist message. Unlike the American government, many Native American tribes have communal economic structures. Termination of reservations became the policy of the government in an effort to eliminate reservations and assimilate Native Americans into white culture. As historians James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson state, “Many of these property owners even claimed that the Indian Reorganization Act [1934] was ‘communistic,’ an enemy to individual initiative and private property” (135).

Even though some conservatives fought against the return to Native American communal values in the defense of private property, there was also a simultaneous push for decolonization after the Second World War. As a people essentially under imperial rule, the Indigenous Americans were, in principle, eligible to benefit from the trend of decolonization by the American decolonization of Indian lands. Historian Paul C. Rosier states, “Indians faced new threats of wholesale removal by the federal government during the so-called termination era (broadly, 1948-1970), activists re-imagined their struggle for sovereignty through an internationalist perspective shaped by the material dimensions of Cold War nation-building programs and the moral dimensions of Third World decolonization” (8). Seeing the US support decolonization abroad, Native American activists, such as Clyde Bellecourt and Dennis Banks of the American Indian Movement, fought for the same treatment within the US. In struggling

to obtain independence, the Native Americans were supposed to throw off colonial influences and reclaim their culture, just as other “third world” citizens aimed to do. However, by eliminating the reservation, decolonization and termination movements could also be impetus to assimilate. Just as Tayo, a biracial man, feels rejected by both Indigenous Americans and whites, Native Americans in the second half of the century felt conflicting pressure to both assimilate and maintain their sovereignty.

Many of the traditions and values portrayed by Tayo, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, are still being upheld today. According to Olsen and Wilson, “Among the Pueblo people of the Southwest, tribal identities are especially strong, as are loyalties to traditional customs. The western Pueblos...remain loyal to their matrilineal clan systems; native tongues; religious ceremonialism; and emphasis on sobriety, control, and inoffensiveness” (211). Despite pressures to assimilate into the American patriarchy, the Laguna Pueblo continue to uphold certain cultural principles, such as tribal traditions, nonviolence, and feminism. In *Ceremony*, the conflict between these values and outside pressures comes to a head.

4.2 *Ceremony* – Plot Summary

Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* tells the story of Tayo, a Native American veteran returning from Japan. In addition, it is the only novel of the three in this study to be told in the third person and feature both prose and poetry. The poetry sections are not explicitly about Tayo, but do set up a great deal of what goes on in his story as well. Just as Tayo initially struggles in the prose portions, there are droughts and conflicts in the early poetry sections: “And there was no more rain then. / Everything dried up” (13). While the world described in the poem is struggling from drought, Tayo’s life is deprived of happiness and direction. He

never knew his father, who was white, and his mother, a rebellious and troubled Native American woman, left him with his aunt when he was a child. He feels alienated at home, where he resides with his grandmother, his judgmental aunt, her husband Robert, their son Rocky, and his other uncle Josiah. Though Rocky outshines Tayo in the white world of school and sports, the two are still close, and they enlist in the army together. When Rocky is killed in battle and Tayo returns home alive, the guilt and trauma are unbearable.

At the outset of the novel, Tayo is troubled by his memories and displays symptoms of PTSD: “He tossed in the old iron bed, and the coiled springs kept squeaking even after he lay still again, calling up him dreams of black night and loud voices rolling him over and over again like debris caught in a flood” (6). He spends time with other Native American veterans, including well-meaning Harley and aggressive Emo. During the war, they were heroes, but after returning to their marginalized status as non-whites, they drink beer “in big mouthfuls like medicine” to cope with their issues (40).

Seeing that Tayo is struggling Tayo’s grandmother brings him to a medicine man, Bentonie. Taking Tayo into isolation, Betonie performs a ceremony that has magical effects on Tayo: he immediately feels improved, but the ceremony is not complete. Rather, Tayo is sent on a mission to reclaim his uncle’s cattle, which disappeared while Tayo and Rocky were in the Pacific. Following his instincts, he begins searching, and with the help of two women, he eventually finds the cattle and begins to steer them back home. Meanwhile, Emo, who despises Tayo, falsely informs the authorities that Tayo is insane, making Tayo a fugitive. While Tayo is with the cattle, he sees Harley and Harley’s friend Leroy, gets in Harley’s truck, and begins drinking beer with them.

However, Tayo immediately begins feeling suspicious about the situation and escapes from Harley and Leroy. Watching from a distance, he sees Emo chastise the two for letting Tayo go. Trying to entice Tayo to reveal himself, Emo begins torturing Harley, eventually killing him, and calling out for Tayo to intervene. However, rather than avenging Harley's death by killing Emo, Tayo completes his healing ceremony by remaining pacifist. After both Harley and Leroy are killed, Emo moves to California. With a sense of closure, Tayo is healed and absolved of the guilt that remained from the war.

4.3 *Ceremony* - Key Theme: Witchery

As a WWII veteran, Tayo was directly affected by American neo-imperialist foreign policy, and the trauma from war continues to have severe consequences in his lifestyle when he returns home. While serving in the army, he and his other Native American friends feel a sense of national belonging and acceptance for the first time. As Tayo describes, “‘They were MacArthur’s boys; white whores took their money same as anyone.... They got the same medals for bravery, the same flag over the coffin’” (42). The symbol of the flag in this description demonstrates the importance of American identity that they experienced during the war. As slain veterans, these men were equal to their white comrades. When Tayo and Rocky visit the military recruiters, he tells them, “‘Anyone can fight for America...even you boys’” (64). By suggesting that “even” Native Americans can fight for the US, the recruiter alludes to their typically marginal place in American society. They are accepted into the culture, but only on the condition that they will be aiding the US in war. Within the scope of the neo-imperialist relationship, Indigenous Americans are exploited by the imperialist, and also help maintain the American hegemony by fighting in its wars.

After the war is won, Tayo and his community return to their previous status: they are poor, some homeless, and white people generally shun them. Bitter about their re-rejection, several of his friends attempt to hold on to the privileges that they felt during the war: “They didn’t even want to give up the cold beer and the blond cunt. Hell no” (42)! They spend many of their nights retelling stories of fucking white women and the respect they felt when they were serving. Like Nathan Price, they found power in domination over white women. Losing out on this, they are betrayed by a country that only granted them temporary social acceptance.

After Tayo and Betonie begin the ceremony, Tayo realizes that his unhappiness is caused by witchery, a spiritual force that perpetuates white dominance in the minds of both whites and Native Americans. Unlike Kingsolver and Theroux, Silko portrays neo-imperialism as larger than any single character. Instead, it is embodied by the witchery, which causes all the conflict in the world, including neo-imperialism:

The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other.... If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery. (191)

A universal force that affects all of humankind, the witchery perpetuates neo-imperialism by justifying the American occupation of Native American lands, and other foreign lands by extension. The witchery is not gendered, racialized, or even specifically personified. Unlike Theroux and Kingsolver, Silko does not limit the witchery to one person or group.

Of all the characters, Emo is the most aggressive and also the most unwilling to relinquish the sense of power that whites gave him during the war; Tayo remarks that Emo

continues to wear the “GI haircut” and carries around a pouch of teeth that he removed from his victims in Japan (229). Coincidentally, Emo’s identity relies heavily on belonging to the American military, and he is the most domineering and aggressive member of the group. Tayo thinks, “Emo had liked what they showed him: big mortar shells that blew tanks and trucks to pieces.... He was the best, they told him; some men didn’t like to feel the quiver of the man they were killing; some men got sick when they smelled the blood. But he was the best; he was one of them. The best. United States Army” (62). Emo identifies with the warrior culture of the army, and unlike Tayo, he fits the role of neo-imperialist as he pursues dominance over the Japanese. He relishes killing men because it marks success in a culture that he wants to a part of and reassures him that he (temporarily) belongs. This violence contradicts the general peacefulness that characterizes the Pueblo tribe.

Similar to Nathan and Allie, Emo is also overly masculine and sexist. Primarily, he focuses on white women as a target; by having sex with them, he avenges white society for rejecting him after the war. He says, “‘They took our land, they took everything! So let’s get our hands on some white women’” (55)! After the war, Emo feels the punch of again being subjected to American neo-imperialism, and by exerting sexual power over white women, he feels that he is able to regain some sort of justice or power. His chauvinism is an indication of his desire to belong to the neo-imperialist culture again.

However, Tayo recognizes that Emo’s attitude and actions are a symptom of the witchery, and that the evil is bigger than Emo himself. This point comes to a head at the end of the novel when Tayo watches Emo harming Harley. When Tayo resists killing Emo, he rejects witchery: “The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo’s skull the way the witchery had wanted.... The white

people would shake their heads, more proud than sad that it took a white man to survive in their world and that these Indians couldn't seem to make it" (253). By realizing the scope of the witchery, Tayo overcomes his emotional struggles and completes the ceremony.

The witchery is multifaceted, and it manifests itself in other ways as well. It maintains American neo-imperialism by not only enticing the whites to steal and occupy Native American land, but also by creating the illusion that their culture is superior. Silko makes clear that witchery propagates white cultural superiority in the minds of whites as well as Native Americans. Betonie states, "They want us to believe all evil resides with white people" (132). The witchery penetrates the minds of several Native American characters as well and is instrumental in creating cultural imperialism: Harley and Emo desire "white things" like "the bright city lights and loud music, the soft sweet food and the cars" without realizing that "all these things had been stolen" (204). Rather than recognizing and fighting the cultural imperialism caused by the witchery, these characters pursue white culture. The witchery causes characters such as Emo to admire white people, their status and their possessions. However, he also resents his oppression, such that he would want to use white women to avenge the white culture that is out of reach for him. Thus, the witchery creates divisions between the two groups: whites as "superior" and Indigenous Americans as "inferior." These divisions perpetuate misunderstandings, hatred, and lies. In this manner, the witchery victimizes everyone.

Additional aspects of the witchery are white territorial dominance and ecological destruction. Tayo reflects on the loss of the Laguna lands in the early 1900s, when they were taken by the state for a National Forest and later sold to logging companies: "The loggers shot the bears and the mountain lions for sport. It was then that the Laguna people understood that

the land had been taken, because they couldn't stop these white people from coming to destroy the animals and the land" (186). Despair for the loss of land is coupled with sadness and frustration with how the ecosystems are being treated. This disrespect for Native American lands, like the other forms of neo-imperialism, stems from the witchery. Unlike the Native Americans, whites do not appreciate the organic. Instead, as the poem illustrates, these perceptions of nature are "set in motion by our witchery" (135). The speaker describes the whites poisoning the water and killing the animals. It states, "When they look / they see only objects. / The world is a dead thing for them" (135). In the US, the view that nature is something to be objectified has been complacently accepted; in the novel, the earth is exploited to construct and test a nuclear bomb. These attitudes undermine and imperialize the Native American cultural perceptions of nature. In addition, this ideology claims Native American lands as white property, thus imperializing the territorial sovereignty of the Laguna Pueblo.

Just as the neo-imperialist problem (witchery) is multifaceted, so are the solutions. Unlike Kingsolver and Theroux, Silko does not create dichotomies. Instead, she argues that the creation of dichotomies and separateness is part of the witchery and causes people to hate, steal from, and lie to each other. In order to overcome the American neo-imperialism that the witchery constructs, people must realize and understand the complexities of the humankind and world. Betonie states, "'They want us to believe that all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction'" (132). Rather than constructing divisions, Tayo's happiness lies in mending them. His ceremony is complete when he rejects the expected ending to the story: he does not kill Emo. In comparison to Nathan's fiery demise and Allie being eaten alive by vultures, the ending to this novel is more

complex and rejects essentializing any one character as “the bad guy” deserving of a horrible death.

Tayo’s multiracial identity is an important point here as well. He is not completely Native American in blood, but unlike Rocky, who is full-blooded Pueblo, Tayo does not reject his Native American heritage. Rocky “understood what he had to do to win in the white world,” which meant taking up football and dating white women, not pursuing Native traditions (51). Tayo, with the help of Betonie and the ceremony, reclaims his uncle’s cattle and his own Indian heritage, and returns home to his family. Thus, Tayo, not Rocky, is the hero of the Native American narrative. Silko employs this irony to demonstrate that race is not supreme: Tayo can be of mixed ancestry and still be the Native American hero. In this manner, *Ceremony* asks the reader to think beyond racial dichotomies. Illustrating this, Tayo thinks, “He was not crazy; he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries” (246).

Like *The Mosquito Coast*, *Ceremony* also presents ecological solutions to overcome neo-imperialism. In the case of those who succumb to the neo-imperialism of the witchery, “The world is a dead thing for them / the trees and rivers are not alive” (135). This points to the importance of the organic. Respect for nature is a central part of Tayo’s culture: he despairs at the ways that the whites have mistreated the land. Eco-friendliness and appreciation of the organic are resistance mechanisms against the witchery, which aims to stunt all biological growth. However, the importance of growth and evolution also exists in the figurative sense. The Native Americans must continue to develop their own culture in order for their heritage to survive. Tayo is healed by the ceremony, a growing, organic ritual. As Betonie states, ““Ceremonies have always been changing.... Witchery works to scare people, to make them

fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we won't make it'" (126). Thus, respect for nature is an important tenet of non-imperialism. Silko presents this in a more sophisticated, complex manner than Theroux, who highlights the importance of nature in only a very literal sense.

In Tayo's search for his uncle's cattle, two women are very helpful in helping him complete the ceremony. The Mexican prostitute, as well, comforts Tayo about the racism that he faces: "They are fools. They blame us, the ones who look different. That way they don't have to think about what has happened inside themselves" (100). Her words remind him to reject the witchery, which "has happened inside" the others already. Thus, like Kingsolver, Silko suggests that women play an important part in overcoming American neo-imperialism. However, again, Silko avoids oversimplifying the text and essentializing her characters. As scholar Paula Gunn Allen discusses, women and men such as Grandmother, Betonie, and Tayo "belong to the earth spirit and live in harmony with her, even though this attunement may lead to tragedy" (233). Thus, even men can identify with the feminine earth spirit, as well as other feminine qualities. Tayo himself becomes gentle and reflective, even "mothering" his uncle's cattle. This novel is in many ways a feminist text because it emphasizes the merits of femininity through Tayo. It also gives a key role to women, who help Tayo heal as he completes the ceremony and confronts the objectification women through Emo's sexism. Thus, it does not stereotype women as essentially more compassionate or sensitive than men, but still discusses the role of women in neo-imperialist conflicts.

5.1 Conclusion

The strategies to combat American neo-imperialism as showcased by Kingsolver, Theroux, and Silko have real potential within the scope of international relations. As Kingsolver claims, women have a special call to realize their complicity about neo-imperialism. White women in particular must address the ways in which they enable or even support the neo-imperialist system. In this sense, Kingsolver's text, which includes a plethora of historical facts and political information, is a tool in and of itself for American readers to recognize and reject their own complicity. While Kingsolver may instill this mission in her readers, it is up to them to take their knowledge further. Literature provides solutions to counteract neo-imperialism, but it is up to people to take initiative to challenge the patriarchal system that perpetuates neo-imperialism. Women in imperialized countries have a special role to play, one which Kingsolver glosses over. Within the international community, for instance, economic organizations have given small loans to women in imperialized nations to start their own business, thus empowering the women, giving them a role in development, and helping to make developing nations economically independent and viable.

Theroux's text, too, succeeds in demonstrating the importance of ecological friendliness in contrast to the ecological destruction that Allie causes in his neo-imperialist endeavor to "civilize" Honduras. This text speaks specifically to the dangers of rapid, foreign-driven development, and to organizations such as the World Trade Organization pressuring developing nations to forgo their own interests (trade protections, environmental standards), in order to please the dominant nations that dictate its goals. Native populations typically bear the brunt of pollution. Thus, it is in their best interest to pursue sustainable living and development, while a neo-imperialist is usually driven by profitability. Sustainable, eco-friendly living, as suggested by Charlie, is an anti-imperialist solution.

However, it is *Ceremony* that offers the most interesting and sophisticated strategies, in part because it is the only novel of the three that follows, or even significantly addresses, the story of the imperialized. The reader experiences the frustration around white domination, as well as the all-encompassing nature of the neo-imperialist ideology, rightly portrayed by the omnipresent witchery. As a text written from the perspective of an imperialized group, however, it does not accuse the imperialists of being any guiltier than the Native American characters like Emo. As scholar April Morgan states, one of the biggest issues in the study of international relations is the tendency to fall into “scripts and stereotypes” (381). Silko avoids such expectations, making her text a potential tool for teaching the true complexities of United States-Native American relations. Emo, with his bag of human teeth, is arguably the novel’s most unlikeable character, but he is not white. Silko thus avoids the “good”/“bad” dichotomy that Theroux and Kingsolver construct. She thus suggests that in order to overcome neo-imperialism, divisions must be mended instead of perpetuated, even if it means that the Indigenous Americans do not get to take out their (rightful) anger on white perpetrators.

Literature provides a new way to think about American neo-imperialism, as well as global politics in general. The circulation of literature is very much about the circulation of ideas. As Kingsolver points out, complicity is often the first obstacle in overcoming neo-imperialism. Literature provides information that breaks the cycle of complicity; moreover, it suggests significant strategies to combat neo-imperialism, groups to empower and norms to adhere to. However, it is also important to consider the factors that dictate the dissemination of literature and ideas. Literature is distributed based on economic factors, and most of the world’s money is controlled by imperialist nations, namely the United States. While these three texts

provide so much insight into overcoming American neo-imperialism, a critical audience must also consider what is not being written.

In conclusion, literature, in both production and content, has strong ties to history, politics, and economics. No author writes in a vacuum: they are influenced by events that happen in the world and in their lives. Literature is therefore an ideal space to examine and overcome neo-imperialism, as well as other issues within international relations. It reframes these events so readers either learn something new or reexamine familiar situations from alternative perspectives. Considering that neo-imperialism is, in Silko's words, "as wide as the world," literature has continuous, vital role in examining and overcoming American neo-imperialism.

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Appendix A

Project Reflection

The experience of producing this work has been very challenging, probably more so than I expected. The first obstacle was choosing a topic. I am a double major in English and international relations, and I always saw connections popping up between the two. The international relations major at St. Kate's consists of history, economics, and political science courses. History, economics, and politics also influence who writes, what they write about, how they write it, and who gets read. I wanted my project to acknowledge and explore the role that literature can play in understanding international relations, because I definitely knew that there was a strong relationship there.

However, I wasn't necessarily sure how to go about this. Any study of literature would require me to choose some texts for close reading, but I was not sure where to begin. I did a lot of Internet searches, but there was just so much out there, and it was hard to decide. I was reading *The Poisonwood Bible* at the time, and it was very obviously written with the neo-imperialism in mind. I settled on the time period in the novel (post WWII) as a good way to limit my further searches. I found *The Mosquito Coast* in a search that I did for novels similar to Kingsolver's. Then, Professor Civil suggested *Ceremony* to me, and I knew that it was the perfect way to round things off; it really provided a framework for me to think about the first two in a way that I hadn't in my first reading.

The next step was the outline. I spent a lot of time on it, and it was very, very extensive. Looking back, I realize that I spent time outlining parts of my paper that didn't end up in the final project. I could have made it easier on myself doing a shorter outline, but at that point, I

wasn't really sure what my project was going to look like in the end. Even though my outline, in retrospect, was unruly, it gave me that sense of control that I needed to feel secure about my project.

With actually writing my paper, it was definitely hard to find the motivation and the time. I always found my paper taking the back seat to other commitments (my other coursework), and without any clear direction, I felt like writing it was turning into a chore. However, working with my committee always gave me a sense of purpose and direction. When I started to feel lost, I felt like they would pull me back and help me feel good about the work that I was doing.

The biggest problem (and it's definitely common for me) was narrowing down my focus and shortening up my paper. The first section of my paper especially, *The Poisonwood Bible* section, got very long. Once I had a better understanding of how my project would function as a whole, I felt a lot more comfortable editing and chopping out parts that really didn't serve a purpose anymore. That section in general was a challenge. I feel like that text was pretty straightforward as far the allegories and the layout, but thinking about it as a tool for understanding neo-imperialism, things were much more complex. Professor Civil reminded me to think about who this book was written for, what it's calling on readers to do, and who is not included in Kingsolver's strategies to combat neo-imperialism.

In the end, I was advised to focus on the significant contribution that each text presents with relation to international relations. Gender, the environment, and the witchery were clearly the most relevant aspects that came through in the three texts. At first, I talked about all the neo-imperialist characteristics and actions in each novel, but things turned out a lot better when

I focused on just one aspect in each novel. I felt like my paper had a clearer direction, and the ties between neo-imperialism and literature became a lot stronger. For example, if we think about gender and neo-imperialism, we can also see a lot more real-life, viable solutions relating to gender and neo-imperialism, and the role that women can play in anti-imperialist strategies.

Thinking about further research, I think that I could do more to connect the novels to real-world solutions, looking at things like case studies and resolution passed by the United Nations. I'm sure that there are organizations actively using the tools that I saw in the three novels to combat neo-imperialism in the developing world. I'd also like to think more about the role that literature can play in the teaching of international relations. Obviously, having knowledge of history and politics give us a richer reading of a text, but conversely, how can reading literature help us understand more about international relations in an educational setting?

Overall, I think this project was more time-consuming than I anticipated. I know that the handbook tells us to allocate the same amount of time for our project as we do for a four-credit class, but I found myself doing much more work. I was constantly working on my project; anytime I spent free time on myself, I felt really guilty that I wasn't working on my project. I am very relieved to have it completed. The level of work, especially when I had a lot to do in my other courses, was too much for me at times. I'm very proud to have finished it successfully, and I think I that that sense of accomplishment really makes it all worth it. I succeeded in my mission to produce a work that links my majors, and I feel very personally connected to the finished product.